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TOPONYMIC EDUCATION AND PRACTICE: TRAINING COURSE IN TOPONYMY

The Pan American Institute of Geography & History (PAIGH) Geographical Names Course on Applied Toponymy

Paper submitted by the United States of America**

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Pan American Institute of Geography & History (PAIGH)
Geographical Names Course
(Applied Toponomy)

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Applied toponomy is the use of geographical names as a direct or supplementary means of analysis and problem solving relating to events requiring analysis and solution. The course (see appendix A) provides an introduction to applied toponomy that should establish a sound basis for each student to further his or her knowledge of the subject and that should enable students to make valuable contributions to their national programs of names standardization. The two weeks devoted to this effort can only give an introduction to each of the major requirements for implementing a program. The possibility of offering an advanced course on specific aspects of implementing procedures is being examined.

The first week of the course is predominantly lecture on various aspects of applied toponomy, concentrating on the requirements for establishing a program of national standardization. The student is introduced to appropriate terminology and provided with a short history of the development of applied toponomy. An analysis of the merits of national standardization is given, along with precise guidelines for establishing a national committee and developing principles, policies, and procedures. Also, staff requirements and office procedures are thoroughly examined. Finally, in an exercise students portray a names staff that interacts with a national names authority in applying principles and policies of standardization.

A comprehensive field exercise offers students the opportunity to gather, process, and analyze data in accordance with established toponymic field procedures. The students gain experience in solving problems associated with raw data gathering (interviews), such as local variations in naming and cultural toponymic bias. They use special topographic maps without names created especially for the exercise. Upon returning from the field, the students receive extensive instruction in data analysis and preparation, especially regarding automated processing.

The second week is devoted to a workshop in automated data processing in which the students design databases and files, and retrieves and analyzes toponymic data in a microprocessing environment. Every aspect of design is addressed to enable efficient data retrieval and analysis. Additionally, the design and production of gazetteers and other special reports are explained in detail. The student attains an understanding of automated processing as a basic tool of applied toponomy.

Since the Sixth Conference in 1992, there have been five courses offered in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil (1992); Tegucigalpa, Honduras (1993); Lima, Peru (1995); Asuncion, Paraguay (1996); and La Paz, Bolivia (1997). Each class includes approximately 20-25 students, most of whom are from the host country, but some are from other member States of PAIGH. During the past five years, the course has been evaluated and re-designed to meet the needs of the member nations of PAIGH regarding programs of geographical names standardization. Evidence indicates that the course has been highly successful and has made a contribution to enhancing local procedures as well as encouraging the implementation of United Nations resolutions regarding geographical names.

APPENDIX A

A Syllabus for the PAIGH Geographical Names Course on Applied Toponomy

Duration - Two weeks

Instructional materials are provided and include manuals and articles as well as a special topographic map for the field exercise.

I. Introduction

- A. Terminology
- B. History of Applied Toponomy
- C. Survey of National Programs Throughout the World
- D. Local guest lectures (also throughout the course as appropriate)

II. National Standardization

- A. A National Board or Committee
  1. Authority
  2. Membership
  3. Staff
- B. Basis for Establishing Principles of Standardization
  1. International Agreements
  2. National, Regional, and Local Specific Requirements
- C. Policies
  1. Rules for Uniform Decisions
  2. Standardization Implementation
- D. Procedures, Methodology, and Guidelines
  1. Requirements
  2. Implementation
  3. Training
- E. Exercise (performed at the end of the course)
  1. Mock Meeting of a National Board
  2. Staff Presentation to the Board
  3. Reversal of Roles (Board and Staff)
  4. Draft Resolution for Establishing National Names Authority

III. Field Exercise

- A. Techniques of Toponymic Field Work

B. Preliminary Examination of Area
   1. Physiography
   2. Urban or Rural
   3. Other Cultural Aspects
   4. Examination of Special Topographic Map of the Area Without Names
   5. Preparation of Interview Questions

C. Trip to the Field
   1. Interviews
   2. Field Notes
   3. Map Annotation

D. Office Analysis and Processing

IV. Automated Processing

A. Introduction
   1. Terminology
   2. Overview of Hardware
   3. Overview of Software
   4. Database Management Systems

B. Office Processing
   1. Data Verification
   2. Loading the Data

C. Data Retrieval Requirements and Techniques
   1. Three Principle Operations
   2. Standard or Routine Retrieval
   3. Specialized retrieval
   4. Formatting Reports
   5. Products

D. Maintenance Procedures
   1. Field Techniques
   2. Other Written Sources
   3. Office Processing (backups)
   4. Updating the Database
   5. User Tracking
   6. Security

E. Workshop
   1. Pre-programmed Environment
   2. Database Design
   3. Retrieval Techniques
   4. Formatting Reports
   5. Questions and Problems

V. Summary

A. Questions
B. Examination of Draft Resolution
C. Course Analysis and Evaluation
D. Closing Ceremonies